

Closing the Feedback Loop in the European Institute at LSE: A Research Report

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Background

Problem Explored: The research explored gaps in the feedback loop at the European Institute, focusing on student awareness of feedback results and their satisfaction with administrative actions taken in response to their feedback. The aim was to identify effective methods for communicating feedback results and managing student expectations.

Motivation and Goals: The motivation for this research stemmed from a recognized need within the European Institute to improve how feedback from students is processed and communicated. Effective feedback mechanisms are essential for continuous improvement and fostering a responsive academic environment. The primary goals were to enhance the transparency of feedback processes, ensure that students are informed about the outcomes of their feedback, and ultimately increase their satisfaction with these processes.

Methodology

Data Used: The study collected data from 21 current students and alumni who had previously given feedback to the European Institute. This sample provided a mix of perspectives from individuals in the Institute and those reflecting on their experiences.

Data Gathering Process:

1. **Consultation Meetings:** We met with our supervisor, Dr. Afroditi Koulaxi, and the staff partner, Dr. Natalie Grace, to clarify research aims and identify key focus areas.
2. **Historical Feedback Analysis:** Historical feedback data from previous students was analyzed to identify recurring themes, common concerns, and gaps in the feedback loop. This included reviewing the Student Evaluation of Programs (SEP) experience.
3. **Questionnaire Development:** A survey questionnaire was developed with input from the staff partner and supervisor. This questionnaire aimed to gather detailed information on students' awareness of feedback results, their satisfaction levels, and their preferred communication methods.
4. **Data Collection:** The questionnaire was distributed to the identified data subjects, and responses were systematically collected and analyzed.

Analysis Approaches: The analysis focused on several key criteria:

- **Awareness:** Evaluating how many students were aware of the results of their feedback.

- **Satisfaction:** Measuring satisfaction levels regarding the actions taken based on their feedback.
- **Communication Channels:** Identifying the effectiveness of various communication methods used to disseminate feedback results.
- **Expectations:** Assessing students' expectations and their understanding of the limitations associated with their feedback.

Challenges and Limitations: The study faced several challenges, including ensuring a representative sample size and dealing with the subjective nature of satisfaction. Potential biases in self-reported data and the variability in individual expectations posed additional limitations. Furthermore, the scope was limited to feedback processes within the European Institute, which might not be entirely generalizable to other departments or institutions.

Literature Review

Existing Research: The research was informed by a body of literature on educational feedback systems, student engagement, and effective communication strategies in higher education. Key studies that influenced this research include:

- Johnstone, M., & Soares, F. (2020). Effective Feedback in Higher Education.
- Harris, K. (2018). Student Engagement and Satisfaction.
- Smith, L. (2017). Communication Strategies in Academic Institutions.

Fit into Wider Research: This study fits into the broader field of educational research by addressing specific gaps in feedback communication and management. It complements existing research by providing empirical data on student perspectives and offering practical recommendations for improving feedback mechanisms.

Contribution to Existing Work: The findings challenge some existing practices by highlighting significant gaps in feedback awareness and satisfaction. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse by suggesting enhanced communication strategies that can be adopted by educational institutions to improve their feedback processes.

Key Findings

1. **Importance of Feedback Awareness:** The study revealed that contrary to our initial assumption that feedback is not important for postgraduate (PGT) students because their stay in the university is limited to one year, all students felt it important to know the results of their feedback (57.1% felt it was moderately important, while 42.9% felt it was extremely important).
2. **Feedback Provided.** Most feedback provided can easily be addressed prior to graduation as it involves improvements in the in-school experience (course-related, events, and workshops) that can be implemented within the short (76.2% of feedback) to medium-term (57,1% of feedback).

3. **Satisfaction Levels:** While students were generally satisfied with the outcomes, many (66.7%) were not aware of the feedback results, indicating that their satisfaction lies in the feedback process rather than a pre-existing feedback loop.
4. **Communication Channels:** The study found that feedback was often communicated through temporal or easily missable means, such as emails (61.9%), class announcements (23.8%), and word of mouth (38.1%).
5. **Student Satisfaction on Feedback Results.** While the majority of students are satisfied with the results of their feedback (52.4%), some are indifferent (38.1%) or dissatisfied with the results of it (9.5%).
6. **Expectation Management:** Majority of students (52.4%) were unaware of the limitations associated with their feedback, which affected their overall satisfaction.

Actionable Results

- **Awareness of Feedback Results:** There is a significant gap in the feedback loop involving student awareness of feedback results that need to be addressed.
- **Preferred Communication Methods:** New means of communication must be implemented to increase student awareness of feedback results, such as participants' suggestions which includes monthly meetings, digital platforms (email, Moodle), social media, newsletters, and a mobile application.
- **Feedback Status Awareness.** Beyond knowing the results, it is important for students (95.2%) to also know the status of their feedback through regular reminders to further increase their satisfaction of the feedback loop.
- **Managing Expectations:** The study found that by simply managing expectations of students on the feasibility or length of time needed to realize their feedback, 85.7% of students will have increased satisfaction over the feedback loop.

Recommendations

Closing the Feedback Loop: To increase overall satisfaction and effectively close the feedback loop, the research recommends the following strategies:

1. **Diverse Communication Channels:** Implementing a variety of communication methods to ensure feedback results and status are communicated to all students (monthly or semestral townhall meetings, centralized digital platforms, or mobile applications where all results and feedback status are stored, alumni engagement through alumni newsletters and LSE Alumni LinkedIn groups, End-of-Program updates, and use of LSE's social media pages or a dedicated feedback page)
2. **Regular Updates:** Providing regular updates on feedback status and outcomes, especially to feedback proponents, through consistent and reliable channels.
3. **Expectation Management:** Clearly communicate limitations, feasibility, and potential outcomes of feedback to students who gave feedback and manage expectations.

Conclusion

The research highlights the critical importance of awareness and satisfaction in the feedback process at the European Institute. By adopting the recommended communication strategies, the Institute can significantly improve its feedback loop, enhancing transparency, managing expectations, and ultimately increasing student satisfaction and engagement.